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# the future of political science? the politics and management of the academic expectations gap: evidence from the UK

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## Abstract

Political science has for some time been afflicted with an existential and empirical angst concerning impact and relevance. This is by no means a new or unique disciplinary pathology, but it is one that has intensified in recent years. The reasons for this intensification have been explored in a burgeoning literature on ‘the tyranny of impact’. The central argument of this article is that a focus on the ‘relevance gap’ within political science, and vis-à-vis the social sciences more generally, risks failing to comprehend the emergence of a far broader and multifaceted ‘expectations gap’. The core argument and contribution of this article is that the future of political science will depend on the politics and management of the ‘expectations gap’ that has emerged. Put slightly differently, the study of politics needs to have a sharper grasp of the politics of its own discipline and the importance of framing, positioning, connecting *vis-à-vis* the broader social context.

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# Keywords

impact  
relevance  
expectations  
gaps  
framing  
social Science  
translation

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In a recent article in *European Political Science* Capano and Verzichelli (2016; see also 2010) explored the structural and contextual factors underlying political science's 'relevance gap'. As a rich seam of scholarship illustrates, debates about the origins, present and future of political science have to some extent dominated the discipline from its inception (see, for example, Farr, 1988; Almond, 1990; King *et al*, 2009). As Philippe Schmitter (2002, 23) argued in another intervention in this journal 'The one thing no one questions is that the disciplined study of politics is in flux'. In the intervening fifteen years even the most cursory review of the discipline-focused literature would suggest this state of flux continues to exist in an ever more pressing form. This article seeks to draw upon the current situation in the UK – for some years a world-leader in terms of imposing market-based managerialist reforms in higher education that often have a subsequent ripple-effect beyond its shores – to explore and dissect this situation of 'flux' in order to understand a set of disciplinary changes that have not, as yet, been fully understood. Indeed, to focus exclusively on the emergence of a 'relevance gap' within political science risks failing to comprehend the emergence of a far broader and multifaceted 'expectations gap'. The core argument and contribution of this article is that the future of political science will depend on the politics and management of the 'expectations gap' that has emerged. Put slightly differently, the study of politics needs to have a sharper grasp of the politics of its own discipline and the importance of framing, positioning, connecting *vis-à-vis* the broader social context. The discipline needs to understand its role not just as a creator of knowledge but also as a knowledge-*filter* and knowledge-*broker*. This notion of an 'expectations gap' – at both the conceptual and empirical level – and its relevance to the future of political science is therefore the focus of this article. In order to develop this argument, the article strides across a very wide disciplinary terrain by focusing on three underpinning (and inter-related) issues:

1. *The Tragedy of Political Science*: In the past, the main disciplinary debates and schisms have generally concerned (*internal*) intra-disciplinary tensions but today they are more focused on the *external* challenge of demonstrating relevance and impact. [The focus on Part I]
2. *The Expectations Gap*: The imposition of a competing set of (often contradictory) pressures has resulted in the emergence of what might be termed an ‘expectations gap’ that risks dividing or splintering the discipline in different ways. [The focus on Part II]
3. *The Politics of Political Science*: The debate about the future of political science might therefore be conceived as one of managing and closing this ‘expectations gap’. This is what might be termed *the future politics of political science*. [The focus on Part III]

The argument about the future may rest to some extent on a critique of what has gone before – it draws upon narratives of tragedy – but overall it is an overwhelmingly positive argument. Higher education is clearly facing challenging times, but the current climate will favour those disciplines that are strategic, proactive and see opportunities where others see only problems. As such the article offers a very direct, clear and provocative set of arguments that focus attention on the future *politics of political science*. By this it means the framing, positioning and responsiveness of the discipline within the broader sociopolitical context. Furthermore, as far to say that the ‘rules of the game’ within higher education are changing and the discipline needs to be far more politically aware and sophisticated in relation not only to playing this game but in *influencing the rules of the game*. And yet to talk about the ‘future of political science’ suggests that there is one integrated and homogenous discipline when in fact we know this is not the case. It also veils the existence of national variations in how the discipline developed and the existence of powerful path dependencies that will shape the future. There are also strong fault-lines running between different sub-fields and within those areas of analysis that operate at the nexus or overlap between a range of disciplines (political-economy, constitutional law, public administration, etc.). And yet this article has no choice but to paint on a rather wide professional and intellectual canvas with a broad brush, but it is to be hoped that by doing so it will

encourage other scholars to fill in the fine detail and counter-points in later analyses.<sup>1</sup>

So let me quickly offer a quick account of each of my three arguments.

## The tragedy of political science

The tragedy of political science is this: the academic study of politics has evolved in a direction that – across the vast majority of its schools, sects and tables – has generally drifted *away* from having any clear value or relevance to those men or women who might seek to use the academic study of politics to help them make sense of the world. There are clearly exceptions to this broad statement in the form of individual scholars or sub-disciplines who have retained a clear social connection, but they are very much the exception rather than the rule in a profession that has incentivised sub-disciplinary balkanisation, methodological hyper-specialism, theoretical fetishism and the development of esoteric discourses. To make such an argument is not to want only engage in the now fairly widespread intellectual sport of flaying political science but to simply admit that whereas David Ricci could once write of *The Tragedy of Political Science* (1982), thirty years later it would probably be more appropriate to discuss the ‘tragedies’ of political science in order to capture the contradictions and complexities that must inevitably be dissected.

### AQ1

I have discussed these tragedies in detail elsewhere, and it is sufficient here to simply note two elements. First, the twentieth century professionalisation of political science had an incredibly strong *internal* logic (i.e. it emphasised scientific methods and theory, but this was never offset by a counter-emphasis on demonstrating the social relevance, value or impact of the discipline). The ‘tragedy of political science’ as David Ricci argued three decades ago is therefore that as the study of politics became more ‘professional’ *and/or* ‘scientific’, it became weaker in terms of both its social relevance and accessibility and as a social force supportive of democracy and democratic values. In a sense the social and political relevance of the study of politics simply melted away. To make this argument is not at all to stand alone but to work within the contours of Bent Flyvbjerg’s *Making Social Science Matter* (2001), Stephen Toulmin’s *Return to Reason* (2003), Ian Shapiro’s *Flight from Reality* (2005), Sanford Schram and Brian Caterino’s *Making Political Science Matter* (2006) and Gerry Stoker and B, Guy Peters *The Relevance of Political*

*Science* (2013) which each in their own ways speak to a debate about the reinvigoration of the discipline and a more explicit connection between political science and contemporary politics and public debate.

This sense of a *re-connection* flows into the second element of ‘the tragedy of political science’ that has little attention within the broader debate but that highlights the manner in which the disconnection that is now viewed as problematic was actually viewed as a positive ambition by parts of the discipline. Indeed, the ‘scientific paradigm’ explicitly sought to depoliticise the study of politics by arguing not only that academics could, through the adoption of a range of techniques derived from the natural sciences, dispose of normative ‘values’ and reveal certain social ‘facts’ but also that academics should remain detached from day-to-day politics for fear of ‘dirtying one’s hands’ and therefore contaminating the purity of the research. (The Caucus for a New Political Science was established in 1967, as Barrow (2008) explains, in direct response to the American Political Science Association’s commitment to political neutrality and non-participation in public debates.) The ontological and epistemological debates stemming from this position have led to the felling of many forests and my wish here is not to engage in those debates apart from highlighting that the depoliticisation of political science through the adoption of rational choice-theoretical approaches was a dangerous myth that veiled the de facto imposition of a highly political set of values about human nature and collective action that could only ever fuel distrust in politicians and public servants. This is because if the baseline assumption of political science is that human beings are interested solely in maximising their own selfish utility then the discipline can only ever breed cynicism, distrust and negativity. Rational choice theory in particular became less of a predictive science of politics or deductive method and more of a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is for exactly this reason that Colin Hay (2009) argues that ‘political scientists have contributed significantly to the demonisation of politics...They trained us, in effect, to be cynical. And in that respect at least, we have been excellent students’.

What I have tried to argue in this section is that during the second half of the twentieth century a ‘new professionalism’ occurred within political science that was generally internally focused on theory and methods. It often sought to (implicitly or explicitly) depoliticise the discipline and led to the emergence of significant concerns within the discipline that have come to a head in recent years. This is not to say that ‘new professionalism’ did not add value or strengthen the discipline in some respects, or that there were no scholars or sub-

fields that did stay engaged. But it is to argue that – overall – the discipline allowed a gap to emerge between its scientific activities and its demonstrable social relevance. This is not a new argument. ‘We’re kidding ourselves if we think this research typically has the obvious public benefit we claim for it’, Jeffrey Isaac, former editor of *Perspectives on Politics*, admitted to the *New York Times* in October 2009. ‘We political scientists can and should do a better job of making the public relevance of our work clearer and of doing more relevant work’. This sentiment resonates with Theda Skocpol’s view that political science spends too much time ‘navel gazing and talking to ourselves’ and Robert Putnam’s argument that as a discipline political science needs to reconnect and to ‘focus on things that the rest of the citizens of our country are concerned about’. John Trent’s (2011) analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of political science left him with the impression that it was ‘a discipline in search of its soul and out of touch with the real world of politics’. The result – in the UK but increasingly around the world – has been ‘the tyranny of impact’ and a requirement that scholars increasingly demonstrate not just the academic value but also the social relevance and demonstrable impact of their publicly funded research beyond academe. I want to take this argument slightly further. It is not just that political science became somewhat ‘out of touch’ but also that a range of sociopolitical variables have shifted in ways that have changed the context within which the social and political sciences operate and the expectations placed upon them. Indeed, the next section argues that an ‘expectations gap’ has emerged and must now be addressed by the discipline through a focus on both *demand-side* and *supply-side* variables. But it also requires that the discipline is far more astute when it comes to recognising the changing *politics of* political science.

## The expectations gap

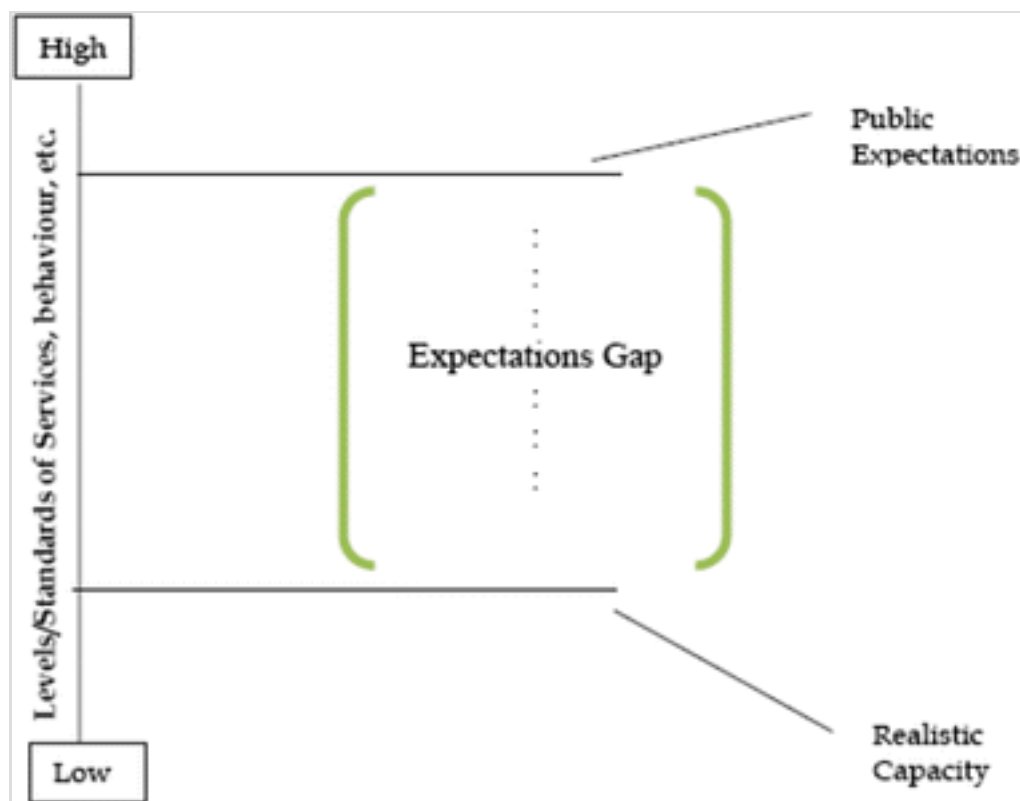
How have the expectations placed upon political scientists actually changed? How can academics undertake a rigorous assessment of political science? What common frameworks or conceptual lenses exist for disciplinary analysis? The simple argument of this section is that the notion of an ‘expectations gap’ – derived itself from the spheres of politics ‘as practice’ and ‘politics as theory’ – provides a valuable heuristic framework through which to offer reflexive capacity (see Ginsberg, 1999; Toje, 2008; Flinders and Kelso, 2011; Flinders and Dommett, 2013). As Figure 1 illustrates, this ‘gap’ is formed by the variance between the realistic level of capacity given the available resource package (i.e. lower bar) and the public expectations placed upon an individual,



organisation, community, discipline, etc.

## Figure 1

Expectations gap.



It could be argued that the existence of a small ‘expectations gap’ may well be positive in the sense that it encourages ambition, reflects external confidence, forces institutions to consider innovations and adaptations, etc. And yet the existence of a large expectations gap also risks becoming pathological in the sense that institutional overload and burnout become real risks. Placed in the context of academe, in general, and political science, in particular, Figure 1 encourages a form of ‘gap analysis’ whereby the demands and pressures placed upon academics and their disciplines (i.e. upper bar) are assessed against some reasonable conception of realistic capacity (i.e. lower bar). As already mentioned, the breadth of this article in terms of ‘the future of political science’ embraces a broad range of countries, sub-fields and institutions. The pressures on predominantly teaching-only universities or liberal arts colleges, for example, are likely to be very different (but not necessarily *less*) than those facing Ivy League, Group of Eight or Russell Group Universities in the USA, Australia and UK (respectively). Indeed, the ‘expectations gap’ might be quite different in nature or size in different parts of the world or between different parts of the higher education landscape within a polity. But the simple fact is that from Sheffield to Sydney vice chancellors are increasingly speaking out about the existence of an untenable gap between supply and demand (see, for example, Burnett, 2016).<sup>2</sup> In this context the options for closing the gap include:



Option 1: Increasing Supply (moving the bottom-bar up);

Option 2: Reducing Demand (moving the top-bar down);

Option 3: A Combination of Options 1 and 2 (closing the gap from above and below)

Focusing on the UK provides a valuable starting point not just because it allows me to draw upon my own professional knowledge and experience but also because the UK tends to be a test bed for far-reaching reforms that are often subsequently adapted and replicated around the world. It therefore fits within future-focused analyses and provides at the very least a starting point for debate and comparison. The professional expectations on a political scientist in the UK are generally divided into five broad areas:

1. *Research*: As displayed through international peer-reviewed publications and significant external research grant income.
2. *Teaching*: Evidence of excellence in teaching as displayed through student feedback and external audit processes.
3. *Administration*: The capacity to undertake significant administrative and managerial responsibilities within and beyond your home department.
4. *Impact*: The ability to demonstrate that your research has achieved a clear, direct and auditable ‘impact’ on non-academic research users and/or the public.
5. *Citizenship*: A clear contribution to professional ‘good citizenship’ through activities such as journal editing, external examining, pastoral responsibilities, government or parliamentary service, leadership of learned societies.

And yet stating these five core expectations underplays the existence of historical, demographic or disciplinary factors that each in their own ways points to not only a widening of the ‘expectations gap’ but also to the existence of an incentives framework that may operate as an impediment to closing this gap in the future. Put very simply, the expectations placed upon academics in the UK and their working environment has changed radically in recent decades. In the post-war decades up until the 1980 s and 1990 s many academics did enjoy a rather charmed existence in which research was a choice rather than a

requirement, and impact-related activities almost non-existent. Administrative duties were minimal, and the age of deference ensured that external audits were minimal. ‘Good citizenship’ was certainly important, but the activities undertaken within this portmanteau term tended to be undertaken in a rather leisurely, even amateurish (typically ‘British’ or ‘Gentlemanly’) manner. Teaching remained the core element of an academic’s role, and even here the expectations were, through a combination of small student numbers and student deference, arguably low. Comparing the professional life of a ‘University Professor of Politics’ – to adopt the focus of Bernard Crick’s 1964 essay on the changing profession that was appended to the second edition of his *Defence* in 1964 – in the 1960s and 1970s with the situation half a century later might lead to the comparison offered in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Initial gap analysis: role shifts in the UK

Element	Then	Now	Evidence
Research	1	4.5	Research Excellence Framework (REF) linked to institutional rankings and disciplinary distribution of research funding, plus demands for greater data access and research transparency
Teaching	3	4.5	Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) assessed through external audit and including student assessment as part of marketised environment and increases in tuition fees
Admin.	1	4.5	Constant quality assurance reviews, recruitment pressures, research-related bureaucratic accountability
Impact	0	4.5	REF-related ‘Impact Case Studies’, ‘Pathways to Impact’ requirements of research applications, post-research ‘Impact Audits’
Citizenship	2	4	‘Good citizenship’ now an element of promotion criteria, contribution to social science capacity part of grant applications
0 = Non-existent, 1 = optional, 2 = low expectations, 3 = clear expectations, 4 = serious expectations, 5 = intense expectations.			

Three caveats need to be made at this point. First and foremost, Table 1 is an incredibly normative and anecdotal exercise drawn from my own 25 years in academe and my discussions with former colleagues (within and beyond the University of Sheffield) about how academic life was for most scholars in the

1960s, 1970s and to some extent into the 1980s. Many more elements of the role were simply more optional than they are today and the expectations on an academic were very different. The second caveat is that there clearly were academics that clearly were producing high-quality research that had a clear social impact during this period – Sir Bernard Crick, the founding professor of my own department, being a good example – but they were exceptional. Moreover, the relatively low demands on academics in the post-war decades created space and capacity to engage beyond academe for those scholars who chose to develop a profile beyond the lecture theatre and seminar room. But overall – as studies such as Jack Hayward, Brian Barry and Archie Brown's *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century* (1999) and Wyn Grant's *The Development of a Discipline* (2010) undoubtedly suggest – a club like, elitist atmosphere existed within the discipline in the UK from the end of World War II until the mid-1980s (or more specifically to the introduction of the first Research Assessment Exercise in 1986).

## AQ2

There is, of course, a great risk of looking back to some form of 'golden age' in which academics had the time to think, reflect, engage with students, take risks in terms of their choice of projects, drink sherry and snooze in their offices. An argument might even be made that the expectations placed upon scholars during these decades were too low and therefore the bar needed to be lifted and this was certainly the view of the Conservative governments that were elected from 1979 onwards. Nevertheless, standards in relation to both research and teaching have undoubtedly increased significantly in recent decades. The question really when considering the future of political science rests with whether the bar has been lifted *too* high and the implications this might have for the future *politics of political science*.<sup>3</sup>

However, before focusing on what the *politics of political science* might look like in the future it is useful to contextualise and dissect some of the elements included in Table 1 as a way of demonstrating the potential value of this simple framework. First and foremost, in the UK the spread of expectations has not been applied in an even manner across each of the five elements included in Table 1. Since the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise in 1986 (replaced by the Research Excellence Framework in 2014) the most distinctive pressure for political scientists in the UK has been to publish. Research, research, research was what secured permanent positions and promotions as departments looked very much to the RAE/REF as an indicator of their quality

and standing in an increasingly aggressive, international and marketised environment. The problem was, however, that this pressure to publish came with additional expectations around methods, language and focus that many have argued took the discipline along a road to irrelevance (the focus of the previous section). Placed within the framework of Ernest Boyer's 'Taxonomy of Scholarly Endeavors' (1997; see also Flinders, 2013a, b) (Table 2, below) political science had fallen into the trap of over-focusing on 'the scholarship of discovery' to the detriment of other equally important forms of knowledge. The inclusion of a significant impact-related component in REF2014 was an explicit acknowledgment by the government that universities needed to focus more on the integration and sharing of knowledge and its practical application *beyond* academe (i.e. Boyer's second, third and fourth forms of knowledge). The planned introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework in 2017 marks a very similar recognition by the government of the manner in which the RAE/REF created an overemphasis on research to the detriment of teaching.

**Table 2**

Ernest Boyer's Taxonomy of Scholarly Endeavors

1. The <i>Scholarship of Discovery</i>	Pushing back the frontiers of human knowledge through research
2. The <i>Scholarship of Integration</i>	Placing discoveries into their larger scientific and social context
3. The <i>Scholarship of Sharing Knowledge</i>	Disseminating the finding of research and its implications within and beyond the lecture theatre and seminar room
4. The <i>Application of Knowledge</i>	The rejection of any false wall between 'pure' and 'applied' knowledge and the capacity to demonstrate some notion of social relevance

The issue, however, is that the current evolution of political science in the UK reveals a general layering of additional demands and expectations upon academics alongside a number of fairly obvious professional inconsistencies or competing pressures:

- To trespass across disciplinary and professional boundaries while also displaying increased hyper-specialisation;
- To enjoy 'academic autonomy' and 'intellectual freedom' in an increasingly

directive and constrained environment;

- To increasingly engage with quantitative methods and ‘big data’ while also producing nuanced, accessible and fine-grained analyses;
- To manage the temporal misalignment between academe timescales and politics in practice;
- To be able to ‘talk to multiple publics in multiple ways’ while acknowledging a constant pressure to ‘tech-up’ within political science;
- To cope with a system where the incentive structure still pushes scholars towards ‘pure’ scholarship and peer reputation rather than ‘applied’ scholarship or public reputation;
- To navigate the problematic relationship between facts and values, and the prevailing rhetoric of neutrality in research;
- To innovate and share ‘best practice’ while also working in a competitive market environment;
- To deliver world-class research and writing while also providing excellence in teaching;
- To provide a personalised student-centred learning experience in a climate of mass and often digitally refracted access.
- To take risks in what is generally a risk-averse professional environment;
- To balance a traditional focus on ‘problem-focused’ political science with external demands for ‘solution-focused’ political science;
- To ensure that research informs public debate without being ‘dumbed down’ or co-opted by partisan actors;
- To be responsive to ‘students-as-customers’ while upholding academic standards and relationships; and
- To achieve some notion of a personal, private or family life while fulfilling the demands of the role.

Three dominant issues flow out of this blur of competing pressures and resonate with the general thrust of the argument illustrated in Table 1. First and foremost, participation rates in higher education have changed dramatically. In 1950 just 3.3 per cent of young people in the UK went to university; by 1970 the rate was 8.4 per cent; and in 2015 the rate was nearer fifty per cent (over half a million young people taking up a university place). In the 1960s and 1970s small group teaching would generally take place in an academic's office and involve no more than a handful of students; in the 1990s small groups had expanded to ten or twelve students; and today small groups are often closer to twenty-five or thirty students in number. (The one-to-one tutorial system that has been at the heart of Oxbridge teaching system for centuries is under increasing financial strain.) One early impact of the TEF is that universities have engaged in almost a bidding war to increase levels of teaching contact time for students that will have obvious knock-on consequences for staff research capacity.

Knock-on consequences, however, for *some* staff more than others. Indeed, one of the key challenges for political science is undoubtedly to address the equality and diversity agenda with more vigour than has hitherto been the case (for a discussion see Flinders *et al*, 2016). Although the study of politics attracts a broadly 50:50 ratio of men and women at the undergraduate level in the UK, less than a third of tenured political scientists in the UK are female (less than fifteen per cent of the professoriate is female and under four per cent from a black or ethnic minority background). As the APSA Task Force on *Political Science for the Twenty-First Century* illustrated, such inequalities within the discipline are by no means unique to the UK. The simple fact would seem to be that the discipline has perpetuated a hidden politics whereby women have implicitly or explicitly been steered towards those elements of the profession that have traditionally been less highly valued in terms of promotion (i.e. teaching, administration, good citizenship). At the same time the recruitment and external research audit framework prizes those with a sustained record of publication and grant capture and works against those who may have had career breaks. Third (and finally) what this very brief review of the current situation in the UK reveals is a shift away from what might be termed the traditional 'all-rounder' academic towards the modern 'specialist scholar'. Traditionally British universities have maintained a broadly egalitarian approach whereby all staff are expected to undertake at least some element of teaching and administration. The exception to this was generally where staff had secured teaching 'buy outs' through external research grants but in the last two or three years a bifurcation

between teaching-only and research-only staff is beginning to emerge. The two extremes of this bifurcation are reflected in a growing academic ‘precariat’ consisting generally of younger new entrants to the profession who are expected to accept either a succession of temporary (and generally teaching-focused) contracts or to undertake an even more precarious academic existence on the basis of a portfolio of fractional roles undertaken concurrently at several different universities. At the other end of the spectrum, however, is the emergence of a cadre of tenured ‘high-impact’ academics who enjoy a visibility within the practitioner and media spheres. The ‘stretch’ or ‘span’ of an academic career has therefore widened significantly in response largely to the imposition of external audit regimes and higher expectations. The malleability of some institutions has reached breaking point and this is reflected in the manner in which some teaching-focused universities have dropped out of the REF process and some research-focused universities are threatening to boycott the forthcoming TEF process (see Havergal, 2016). And yet my sense is that this fragmentation appears to be locking-in rather than challenging a number of pre-existing inequalities within the discipline. For example, the research professors and ‘high-impact’ professors generally make little contribution in the sphere of institutional or academic governance and undertake little (if any) teaching. They are also generally men.

The simple argument of this section is that the expectations placed upon political science have grown in recent years. This has created an ‘expectations gap’ that must somehow be managed or ideally closed. It is the politics and management of this ‘gap’ that will define political science in the future. The question is therefore one of how this gap might be managed and the nature of the political strategy that should be adopted.

## The politics of political science

The status and future of political science is fragile in many places. Just as society is changing then so must political science evolve and adapt. To some extent the evolution of the discipline has arguably not kept pace with the wider social context and this helps explain why such concern about the ‘relevance gap’ has emerged (the New Economics Movement, the rise of Public Sociology, etc.). In this regard the discipline is not alone and similar debates about ‘roads to irrelevance’ have been the focus of strong debates elsewhere. And yet as the ‘master science’ a healthy, flourishing and engaged discipline of political science has never been more important in terms of its potential social



contribution. In this regard C. Wright Mills' arguments about 'the trap' and 'the promise' of the social and political sciences remain stronger now than when *The Sociological Imagination* was first published in 1959. But, as Capano and Verzichelli correctly suggest, political science is now under considerable external pressure to modify its inherited cultural and cognitive features. Put slightly differently, the emphasis is now on *engaged scholarship* – very much of the form advocated by C. Wright Mills – and this is clearly reflected in large funding schemes such as the EU's Horizon 2020, or the multi-billion pound Global Challenges Research Fund in the UK. The questions then are how the discipline might (1) react to the changing socio-economic context, (2) ensure that potentially restrictive cultural and institutional path dependencies do not constrain its social impact and (3) remain an 'honest broker' in the Pielke-ian sense (2007).

The short answer to these questions – and with the expectations gap that appears to have emerged in mind – is that a *new politics* of political science is necessary, or a new professionalism that permeates down from learned societies, professional associations and funders, through institutional units and to individual scholars. That is a *new politics* that is – quite simply – more aware of the external context in which sciences take place and that balance internal expertise and external engagement. More specifically the nexus *between* academe and society must form the focus of greater attention and, as a result, the role of an academic is likely to change. As the Brexit debate in the UK illustrated, politicians will always ignore or seek to reinterpret research that does not suit their partisan needs, but there is a far wider community of potential research users than the discipline generally recognises. The dominant perception of a clear qualitative distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' research will have to be recast in a more dynamic mode of understanding. More specifically, there will have to be some understanding of the manner in which 'impact' can actually underpin, nourish and nurture excellence in terms of both research and teaching. Once again, the 'new politics' or 'new professionalism' will have to understand the knowledge ecosystem in ways that have largely been forgotten but must now be rediscovered if the discipline is to prosper. The exact nature of this new disciplinary strategy will be for national associations and institutions to decide, but in terms of offering elements of this 'new politics' the following ideas are worthy of consideration.

Firstly, political science cannot and should not adopt a victim mentality but a more robust and confident professional persona. In this regard the role of the

main learned societies is vital as the source of external promotional activities and more specifically as the driver of proactive knowledge-*brokerage*, knowledge-*filtering* and knowledge-*framing* activities. Put within the framework of Figure 1, the role of learned societies and professional associations has to support the discipline in terms of raising the lower bar of realistic capacity where possible while paying far more attention to their external/strategic role in actually managing the expectations of the public and policy makers *vis-à-vis* the upper bar (i.e. Option 3, above). Put simply, learned societies and professional associations must take the lead in closing the expectations gap from above and below. In this regard, relatively simple steps can yield significant returns. Of particular significance, for example, given the temporal misalignment between academe timescales and politics in practice is a clear approach to horizon-scanning so that translated packages of research can be prepared and delivered to research users (media, practitioners, etc.) at specific ‘windows of opportunity’ when the demand for such information will be high. Moreover, learned societies, in partnership with funders and research users, should also take the lead in terms of innovating in relation to both training and bridging activities.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, there needs to be a generational approach to student recruitment that moves the focus down the educational pipeline so that students in schools and colleges appreciate exactly what the study of politics involves and why it matters, its potential in both intellectual and vocational terms and the available professional career paths via higher education. This educational pipeline provides a critical tool through which to understand and address long-standing issues concerning diversity and inequality and – beyond this – to democratise the study of politics to exactly those sectors of society who appear to have become disenchanted.

A third element is highly political and involves the colonisation of the broader research community in terms of places on the boards of research bodies, government advisory bodies, international non-governmental organisations, media organisations, etc. My sense is that other disciplines have been far more professional and ambitious in terms of monitoring when places on influential organisations are advertised and then encouraging (and supporting) members of their discipline to apply. This allows the discipline to be embedded and have tentacles far beyond the university sector and to have ambassadors in key posts. Once again, this regular vacancy monitoring and proactive encouragement is fairly low cost but potentially incredibly important for the external profile and visibility of a discipline. The targeting of professional appointments can also be built into a more ambitious equality and diversity agenda, while also being of

value to the individual academic in terms of their ‘good citizenship’ requirements and the need for impact-related or research-related networks. (This targeted approach to recruitment also works in the opposite direction in the sense that professional associations and learned societies might also usefully include a number of non-academic research users on their boards.) What these three elements really point to is the manner in which the ‘scientific’ and the ‘political’ (or the ‘academic’ and the ‘public’) components are both mutually interdependent – almost positively parasitical in the sense that they feed upon each other – within a modern academic career where the professional responsibilities of academics to the public who fund their work are increasingly explicit. In this regard claims to be delivering more research of a higher quality will carry little weight if that research does not percolate through into the public sphere in accessible and purposeful ways. Without this ‘new politics’ political science will be politically disadvantaged (and therefore structurally disadvantaged in resource terms) *vis-à-vis* other disciplines in a climate of already shrinking resources.

### AQ3

## Notes

- 1 Readers might be interested in a new COST Action Group on ‘The Professionalisation and Social Impact of European Political Science’ (ProSEPS) that is headed by Gilberto Capano and was launched in September 2016.
- 2 See, for example, Burnett, K. ‘Cash Starved Campuses must raise fees or drop standards’, *Times Higher*, 1 Sept. 2016.
- 3 For a broad statement on the current expectations gap in the UK see <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/comment/cash-starved-campus-must-raise-fees-or-drop-standards>.
- 4 The success of the ‘Total Exposure’ project in the UK being a particular example of low-cost, high-reward activities that build long-term networks that span professional boundaries. <https://www.psa.ac.uk/totalexposure>.

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